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'Women's experiences of sport volunteering: "... this is what I've been missing for years''

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Individual presentation

10. Health and Physical Education

Internationally, there is a general concern with lower levels of engagement in sport by women and girls in comparison to men and boys. This concern has largely focused on active sports participation. The research discussed in this presentation takes a different perspective, foregrounding women as sports volunteers. Within England, sport is the third most common sector in which people volunteer and the Active People Survey (2014/15) reveals that two-fifths of sports volunteers are female. Quantitative research in sports volunteering has focused on satisfaction, decision-making, time and future intentions. Traditionally volunteering has been associated with altruism where volunteers have a lifelong commitment to support the group they are serving. More recently, this simplistic notion of volunteering has been extended through the development of a number of frameworks that offer a more complex understanding of volunteer motives, aspirations and commitment.

This research draws upon these frameworks and aims to explore *why* and *how* women volunteer in sport. By taking a gendered analysis we explore the key factors and circumstances that facilitate and challenge participation in sports volunteering. Over 50 women and men were interviewed from three regions in England, across three contexts: core sports (boxing, rugby league, netball, cycling, tennis and disability sports); mass market sports (Park Run); and the non-sport/ leisure sector. This presentation focuses upon data generated from the core sports context and considers: (a) how life *choices* or *circumstances* influenced the frequency, consistency and amount of time that women could dedicate to volunteering, (b) the kinds of challenges women experienced in their quest to volunteer, (c) how they navigated these

challenges, and (d) what governing bodies of sport can learn from these women's experiences to better serve the needs of their women volunteers.

These findings demonstrate that a number of gendered differences influence women's sport volunteering experiences, and that the intersections of gender with disability and/or ethnicity lead to more or less favourable experiences for some volunteers. Many of the women experienced discriminatory stereotyping that influenced their volunteering and sense of wellbeing. Importantly, some women were able to draw on the support of others to navigate challenges and to enable positive personal outcomes. The findings offer a valuable resource for governing bodies of sport to enable them in their future planning, marketing, and training of their volunteer workforce. In so doing, they will be better placed to attract and retain more women in volunteering roles within their sport.